



# 5- Year Strategic Plan

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES**

P.O. BOX 346

JACKSON, MS 39205

COMMISSIONER ANDREA A. SANDERS

# 1661

# Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services

## 5-Year Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) is Mississippi’s lead child welfare agency, responsible for administering programs under Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Mississippi law assigns MDCPS responsibility for “[t]he programs and services [formerly] provided by the Office of Family and Children’s Services of the Department of Human Services.”<sup>1</sup> This statutory authority includes primary responsibility for protective services for children, foster care, adoption, interstate compact, and licensure.<sup>2</sup>

MDCPS is led by a commissioner who is appointed by the Governor, and who exercises complete and exclusive operational control of the Department’s functions, except where she and the Executive Director of The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) agree to share administrative support services.<sup>3</sup> Until June 30, 2023, pursuant to a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies, MDHS provided administrative support services for MDCPS in the following areas: accounts payable, accounts receivable, purchasing, travel reimbursement, employee benefit coordination, subgrant monitoring and audit, cost allocation, property management, and network and hardware information technology services. MDCPS maintains sole responsibility for its programmatic functions. MDHS will no longer provide support to MDCPS effective July 1, 2023. In 2023, the Mississippi legislature acted to fully separate MDCPS from the Mississippi Department of Human Services and enacted legislation to authorize MDCPS with responsibility for child welfare services. See H.B. No. 1149.

### Mission

The mission of MDCPS is to protect children, support families, and encourage lasting family connections. MDCPS is firm in its belief that Mississippi’s children should grow up in strong families, safe from harm, and supported through partnerships that promote family stability and permanency.

### Philosophy

The philosophy of the agency is to provide for the safety and well-being of children first in their own homes if possible and in cases where it is not safe or practical for the child to remain, the agency will work with community connections, law enforcement, service providers, other state agencies, and the courts to move each child toward the appropriate placement and permanency in a timely manner.

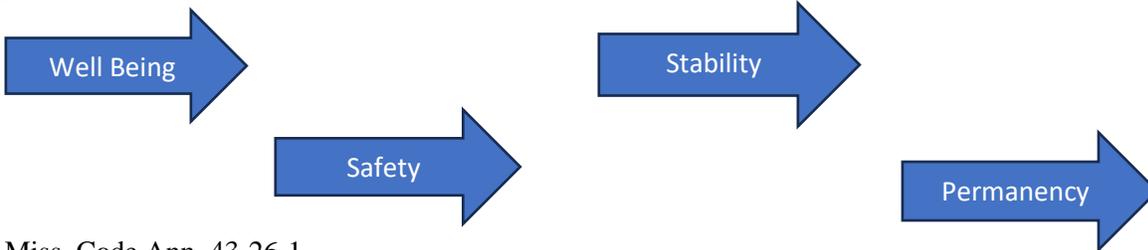
---

<sup>1</sup> *Id.*

<sup>2</sup> Miss. Code Ann. 43-1-51.

<sup>3</sup> Miss. Code Ann. 43-26-1.

## Goals



<sup>1</sup> Miss. Code Ann. 43-26-1.

## Relevant Statewide Goal: Human Services

### Statewide Goal #1

“To ensure that Mississippians are able to develop to their full potential by having their basic needs met, including the need for adequate food and shelter and a healthy, stable, and nurturing family environment or a competent and caring system of social support.”

### Statewide Benchmark #1

Substantiated incidence of child abuse or neglect (per 1,000 population)

### Statewide Benchmark #2

Number of children in agency custody

### Statewide Benchmark #3

Average time (in days) a child is held in emergency shelters and other temporary holding facilities before being placed in foster care

### Statewide Benchmark #4

Average time (in months) a child is in foster care

### Statewide Benchmark #5

Average time (in days) between a child in foster care being declared legally eligible for adoption and adoption

### Statewide Benchmark #6

Percentage of children in foster care legally eligible for adoption who are adopted, by category

## External and Internal Assessments

### INTERNAL

#### Strengths:

- Innovative and Diverse Leadership team
- Engaged staff
- Administration’s willingness to try new approaches/solutions
- Alignment in “plan of work” philosophy
- The addition of the Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports to the Executive Leadership team has been beneficial in providing improved targeted training

- Infusion of trauma-informed care into Practice Model Learning Cycle
- Data-informed decision-making
- In the progress of replacing the legacy case management system

**Weaknesses:**

- Frontline staff turnover/retention issues
- Public image – child welfare’s troubled history
- Field operations – inexperienced supervisors/middle-management
- Aging/fragile MACWIS computer database system

**EXTERNAL**

**Opportunities:**

- Renewed and vocal support from Governor’s office and the Mississippi Legislature
- Family First Act – shifting federal priorities away from state custody/foster care toward in-home care
- Faith-based partnerships/Community stakeholders
- Engaged court system/AOC partnership
- Performance Improvement Plans – federal performance reviews informing practice
- Identifying opportunities to maximize funding streams
- Clarification of MDCPS's relationship with the MS Department of Human Services
- Identification of opportunities to collaborate with other state agencies, non-profit service providers and faith-based organizations to better align services to families and children

**Threats:**

- Renewed option for receivership; ongoing Olivia Y lawsuit compliance issues; court oversight; legal costs
- Potential influx of children as a result of Supreme Court ruling in Dobbs case

**Internal Management Systems**

Foster Care Reviews

Continuous Quality Improvement Plan

Olivia Y Court Monitor Quarterly/Annual Reports

Compliance Audit by MS State Auditor

Subgrant Monitoring

Internal Audit Division

# MDCPS

## 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

**GOAL A: SAFETY** Protect Mississippi’s children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

- **OBJECTIVE A.1:** We will inform mandated reporters and the general public about Mississippi Centralized Intake process and their reporting responsibilities for suspected abuse, neglect and exploitation.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Use of available reporting tools

*Outcome performance indicator:* Information provided in reports

- **STRATEGY A.1.1:** Provide training and educational opportunities to mandated reporters via seminar presentations, online training, printed materials, and other outreach efforts to increase awareness and improve use of the 24-hour 1-800-222-8000 hotline, MDCPS online abuse reporting tool and smartphone app.

*Output:* Number of educational and training opportunities provided.

*Outcome:* Increase in number of reports made using available reporting tools.

*Outcome:* Increase accuracy and completeness of information reported.

- **OBJECTIVE A.2:** We will timely initiate and complete abuse, neglect, and exploitation investigations.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Investigations opened according to policy timeframes

*Outcome performance indicator:* Investigations completed according to policy timeframes

- **STRATEGY A.2.1:** Abuse, neglect and exploitation investigations will be timely initiated and completed by frontline staff after being screened by MCI and referred to appropriate county office

*Output:* Number and percentage of investigations initiated and completed timely.

*Outcome:* Decrease in time between screened report and initiation/completion of investigation.

- **OBJECTIVE A.3:** We will promote ongoing safety of at-risk children.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Families involved with MDCPS receive safety and prevention information and parenting training to reduce recurrence of harm and avoid future injury to children.

*Outcome performance indicator:* MDCPS is implementing Structured Decision Making (SDM). This model uses structured assessments to improve the consistency and validity of each decision throughout the life of the child welfare case.

- STRATEGY A.3.1: Offer safety information and parenting training to families with an ongoing or previous relationship with MDCPS through in-home prevention or foster care services.

*Output:* Number of recurring instances of safety/neglect/abuse problems.

*Outcome:* Decrease in recidivism rates of children coming back into MDCPS involvement after closure of in-home services or after reunification, adoption, or other non-state custody arrangement.

*Explanatory:* This is a preventive strategy to reduce the number of children who re-enter the state's child welfare system as well as to reduce any new occurrence of avoidable harm to children. MDCPS also provides child abuse prevention programs to families with no previous involvement with the agency.

## **GOAL B: WELL-BEING** Mississippi will operate a safe and supportive foster care system.

- **OBJECTIVE B.1:** We will strengthen safety assessments, foster child placement and case planning/management/staffing processes.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Adoption and use of model safety assessment tool

*Outcome performance indicator:* Use of case planning/management and staffing tools

*Outcome performance indicator:* Placement of foster children into least restrictive and most appropriate environment

- STRATEGY B.1.1: Research, adopt and implement use of model safety assessment tool by frontline staff

*Output:* Number of assessments conducted, and family service plans implemented with fidelity to the Practice Model.

*Outcome:* Increase in appropriate services provided to children/family based on appropriate safety assessments and case planning.

*Explanatory:* This is a safety strategy to appropriately guide caseworker and supervisory handling of safety assessment and child welfare/foster care cases in accordance with the agency's trauma-informed practice model expectations.

- STRATEGY B.1.2: Adopt use of standardized family-led case planning model and case staffing tool by frontline staff and supervisors.

*Output:* Number of family service plans implemented with fidelity to the Practice Model.

*Output:* Number of weekly case staffings conducted using standardized tool.

*Outcome:* Increase in appropriate services provided on a timely basis with fidelity to practice model and agency policy.

*Explanatory:* Agency policy and the 2<sup>nd</sup> MSA set performance standards for the timely delivery of services to foster children. These include medical, educational, and mental health services.

- STRATEGY B.1.3.: Recruit, license and monitor foster homes statewide to meet in-custody children's needs

*Output:* Number of new foster homes licensed annually and renewed licensure of existing homes.

*Outcome:* Increase in number and geographic distribution of licensed foster homes statewide.

- **OBJECTIVE B.2:** We will meet physical, educational, emotional/behavioral, and medical needs of foster children and families throughout custody/placement.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Provision of appropriate medical, dental, and mental health services to foster children.

- STRATEGY B.2.1: Provide foster children with timely physical and psychological exams upon entering state custody

*Output:* Number of foster children receiving timely medical and psychological exams as recorded in case files.

*Outcome:* Increase in percentage of foster children receiving timely physical and psychological services.

- STRATEGY B.2.2: Provide foster children with appropriate medical, dental, and psychological care throughout foster care placement.

*Output:* Number of foster children receiving appropriate medical, dental, and psychological care throughout foster care placement.

*Outcome:* Increase in percentage of foster children receiving appropriate medical care throughout foster care placement.

- STRATEGY B.2.3.: Ensure foster children receiving IEP evaluation/updates and be provided special educational assistance as needed throughout foster care placement.

*Output:* Number of foster children receiving appropriate educational support services throughout foster care placement.

*Outcome:* Increase in percentage of foster children receiving appropriate educational assistance and appropriate educational support services throughout foster care placement.

- **OBJECTIVE B.3:** We will maintain child/family connections throughout foster care.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Provision of regular and timely visitation with birth parent(s), siblings, and other family members throughout foster care placement.

- STRATEGY B.3.1: Provide foster children with timely family visits
  - Output:* Number of foster children receiving timely visits with birth parent(s) and siblings as recorded in case files.
  - Outcome:* Increase in percentage of foster children receiving visits with parents and siblings to maintain family connections
- STRATEGY B.3.2: Involve birth parent(s), extended family, and siblings (when appropriate) in developing and updating family service plan and child’s permanency plan throughout foster care period.
  - Output:* Number of family team meetings with documented participation.
  - Outcome:* Increase in parental and family involvement in case planning to maintain family connections

**GOAL C: PERMANENCY** Mississippi children will be safe and protected through permanent family connections.

- **OBJECTIVE C.1:** We will avoid trauma of child removal whenever safely possible to keep families intact.
  - Outcome performance indicator:* Provision of appropriate in-home services and prevention efforts to avoid trauma of child removal.
- STRATEGY C.1.1.: Maximize in-home services available through inCIRCLE program to prevent avoidable removal of children whenever safely possible
  - Output:* Number of families/children receiving in-home services and their self-assessment of skills obtained by participating.
  - Outcome:* Increase in the number of children who were NOT brought into state custody because of in-home intervention with intensive family services.
  - Explanatory:* The inCIRCLE Family Support Services program provides intensive in-home services to families at-risk of having their children removed and placed into state custody unless safety and neglect problems can be addressed and resolved. It is a comprehensive home and community-based family preservation, reunification and support services program in which families receive up to 10 hours a week for two to three months of customized support services. Children, families, and youth are actively involved in identifying their strengths, needs and service requests – and in developing family service plans to address those areas.
- **OBJECTIVE C.2:** We will reunify children with birth families whenever safely possible.
  - Outcome performance indicator:* Reunification of children with birth families
- STRATEGY C.2.1.: Ensure children remain in state custody no longer than is necessary to ensure their safe and secure return to their birth family, whenever reunification is safely possible.
  - Output:* Length of time in MDCPS custody before reunification.

- Outcome:* Decrease the time children spend in MDCPS custody prior to reunification with birth families, whenever reunification is safely recommended.
- **STRATEGY C.2.2.:** Work with courts/judges to ensure all reasonable efforts are made and recorded to reunification as soon as safely possible
    - Output:* Number of family reunifications
    - Output:* Average time in custody before reunification
    - Outcome:* Decrease the average time in custody before reunification
  - **OBJECTIVE C.3:** We will facilitate timely adoptions or legal guardianships for foster children when reunification is not safely possible or recommended.
    - Outcome performance indicator:* Timely adoption of children with permanent plan for adoption
  - **STRATEGY C.3.1.:** Monitor TPR/adoption packet progress to address issues and avoid adoption delays
    - Output:* Length of time from when adoptions are approved as permanent plan and TPRs are finalized.
    - Outcome:* Decrease the time required for Termination of Parental Rights
  - **STRATEGY C.3.2.:** Reduce/eliminate backlog of court hearing dates on adoption/TPR hearings.
    - Output:* Number of adoptions/TPRs timely finalized
    - Outcome:* Reduce the number of continuances of adoption/TPR hearings.
  - **STRATEGY C.3.3.:** Reasonable Efforts are appropriately documented in adoption case files and court records.
    - Output:* Number of case files reflecting appropriate reasonable efforts documentation.
    - Outcome:* Increase the percentage of adoption cases where appropriate reasonable efforts have been documented.
    - Explanatory:* MDCPS and the courts are required to document what “reasonable efforts” have been made to prevent removal of at-risk children from their homes and strengthen the family as well as reasonable efforts to reunify children with their birth parents and to achieve swiftly other permanency alternatives such as adoption. Court records and case files should include a factual description of efforts, not just concluding statements.
  - **OBJECTIVE C.4:** We will provide independent living skills and appropriate support for older foster children.
    - Outcome performance indicator:* Timely adoption of children with permanent plan for adoption

- STRATEGY C.4.1.: Support legislative approval of college tuition credits for eligible foster youth involved in Youth Transition Support Services
  - Output:* Number of students impacted by tuition credits if legislation is approved.
  - Outcome:* Increase in students receiving college-level education
- STRATEGY C.4.2.: Expand participation and services provided to foster youth aged 14+ through Youth Transition Support Services.
  - Output:* Number of youths actively participating in the Youth Transition Support Services program
  - Outcome:* Increase the percentage of older youth preparing to transition to independent living as young adults
  - Explanatory:* The MDCPS Youth Transition Support Services (formerly Independent Living) program assists older foster care youth with housing, education, employment and transportation as they prepare to “age out” of the foster care system. Beginning at age 14, foster youth can receive services and skills training until they exit custody through adoption, permanent placement, reunification, emancipation, or age. Aftercare Services are available to youth who exit custody at age 18 until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

**GOAL D: STABILITY** Mississippi will create, equip, support and sustain an effective and efficient Department of Child Protection Services.

- **OBJECTIVE D.1:** We will seek legal release from the Olivia Y lawsuit by sustained performance compliance with requirements the Modified Settlement Agreement of Olivia Y lawsuit, as financially able to do so.
  - Outcome performance indicator:* Specific performance measure requirements in the Modified Settlement Agreement
- STRATEGY D.1: Substantially comply with 131 Key Performance Indicators as required by the Modified Settlement Agreement.
  - Output:* Number of performance measures substantially met or exceeded.
  - Efficiency:* Court monitor’s assessment of MDCPS compliance with all required performance standards in the Olivia Y consent agreement by the specified dates using measurements established and/or approved by the court-appointed monitor.
  - Explanatory:* The Key Performance Indicators in the Second Modified Settlement Agreement include specific performance requirements for specific time periods in the targeted areas of: Child Protection, Licensure, Caseload Standards, Caseworker Visits, Child Placement, Connections, Permanency, and Services.
- **OBJECTIVE D.2:** We will develop new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System for use by agency caseworkers and staff to collect, maintain and report accurate case data for all child welfare cases and investigations.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Development of CCWIS case management information system

- STRATEGY D.2.1.: Design, produce and implement CCWIS-compliant case management information system

*Output:* MDCPS has contracted with a vendor

*Output:* System operational as soon as possible with target date of June 30, 2024.

*Outcome:* Increased caseworker and supervisor satisfaction and increased productivity/accuracy of case management functions.

*Explanatory:* The 2<sup>nd</sup> MSA required MDCPS to develop a new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System which meets federal requirements by June 30, 2021. The system must permit timely access by authorized MDCPS staff to information, including current and historical case documents, to support child safety and continuity of care across placement settings and services; capture, track and report application financial information and performance requirements; and include prompts for workers and supervisors regarding required actions in a child's case.

- **OBJECTIVE D.3:** We will maximize use of federal and explore use of private funds to supplement state resources

*Outcome performance indicator:* Development of new or additional federal and private funding resources

- STRATEGY D.3.1.: Improve caseworker understanding and response accuracy to Random Moment Sample surveys through education, training, and supervisory oversight

*Output:* Number of frontline workers trained in how to respond accurately and timely to Random Moment Sample surveys

*Efficiency:* Increased response rates to reflect accurately appropriate work activities eligible for federal funding reimbursement.

- STRATEGY D.3.2: Implement process changes and make corrections to eligibility process and practice as outlined in Title IV-E Program Improvement Plan

*Output:* Number of foster children correctly documented in case file to ensure timely eligibility status for Title IV-E funding

*Outcome:* Increased rate of eligible IV-E children as allowed by federal guidelines and regulations.

*Explanatory measure:* Federal IV-E regulations and guidelines affect eligibility determinations. MDCPS will work to increase the number of eligible children to receive federally funded board payments/services (in lieu of state-funded payments) while complying with these federal requirements.

- **OBJECTIVE D.4:** We will hire, train, equip and retain adequate child welfare frontline, supervisory and support staff to meet caseloads standards and provide appropriate services.

*Outcome performance indicator:* Compliance with court-ordered caseload standards for frontline caseworkers and supervisors

- STRATEGY D.4: Hire and retain additional frontline caseworkers and Area Social Work Supervisors as needed to meet caseload standards

*Output:* Number of frontline workers and supervisors hired and retained

*Outcome:* Increased percentage of caseworkers and supervisors meeting caseload requirements.

*Explanatory measure:* Olivia Y lawsuit settlement agreement requires MDCPS to maintain at least 90 percent of its caseworkers in compliance with maximum workload standards. (Caseworkers will have caseloads which do not exceed the caseload standards computed in a weighted matrix approved by the court; i.e. 14 child protection investigations, or 14 ongoing foster care cases with placement responsibility and service of 17 in-home cases or 15 adoption service cases, and other similar assignments or combinations.)